

Too Many Tales by DM Denton

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Written in reflection of a local no-kill shelter that had been raided and shut down.

We waded into a sea of faces masked in markings of black and white, gray and ginger, eyes shining through from a galaxy all their own. There were jewels in each look, some sparkling, others sadder from losing their luster. Tails were confident and questioning, like sails bringing a fleet of ships into the harbor of our hearts. We were surrounded, and soon surrendered to whatever fate had in store for us, too. It was almost Dickensian, so many orphans vying for our attention; the first tiny one put in my arms was thinner than should be survivable, but as hungry for love. How frightened he was, not to be held but let go, rejected that day and every other. That moment was all the hope he had, the back of a cage somewhere to disappear in forever.

My mother sat in a chair as wobbly as her resolve not to adopt more than one. She was a queen holding audience for subjects that were hardly deferential as they curled and climbed and clamored to be her favorite. It seemed the most natural thing for Mom to be covered with such a crowd lying at and even on her feet, piling into her lap, begging her embrace. She was as adoring as adored, her shoulders easily bearing the weight, her neck encircled, her composure finally crowned. She reached up to see who was so agile and awkward at the same time. It was a long slender cat purring loudly with eyes closed tight. *Oh, that's Tilly—we were told—she was recently adopted and returned a few days later.* Returned? Like a piece of clothing that didn't fit right? Or an appliance that didn't work? *Oh—it was edgily explained—the lady said she couldn't deal with such a loving creature.*

There wasn't any doubt. Tilly was affectionate enough to bring the warring world to its knees. She would never give up on love, never stop believing caresses and kisses and kindness were what she was born for. She was soft and white with an upturned pink nose and silky black cap framing her forehead and veiling her ears, a matching cape dressing her back and trailing down her tail. She was limp and lovely in my mother's arms, her eyes suddenly swirling green and lifting up, still looking for a promise she knew might be broken.

The manager and volunteers did their best taking in every cat abandoned to abandonment, providing more than food and shelter, healing wounds, offering a place of belonging for days or weeks or years. They knew every name, personality, and all the stories that should have been too many to remember. They might have been glad of anyone to take some of the responsibility off their hands, but there was something more important to consider than seeing the numbers decline.

And so more cats came than went, left at the door and in the road, found in snow banks and ditches and barns, rescued from fighting and pregnancy and disease, given the chance to grow up and be cherished.

What was it like when their crowded but companionable world was raided? How frightening was it to be counted and cataloged and taken away? Perhaps it was all for the good, everyone finally paying attention and wanting to help. But accusations didn't acknowledge the good intentions that weren't ever lost, just overwhelmed because they were so undervalued.

There's confusion in my heart over what the shelter did right and how it went wrong.

And why we didn't take Tilly. We were reassured she would soon be adopted again and continued with our choice of a kitten. We left with the skinny one who never let us doubt his happiness; and his brother, a munchkin, who a few days later almost stopped breathing but was saved for a lifetime of memories and a tale for another day.